

PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A CASE STUDIES SERIES



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The views expressed in these case studies are those of the respective organisations and the publication of the case studies should not be viewed as an endorsement of these organisations and their work by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. The data and statistics presented within the case studies have been locally collected and cannot be verified by the Home Office, Clinks and Social Firms UK.

Background

Low qualifications and lack of employment are recognised within the Government's strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation* as key social issues related to re-offending.*

Some local areas have already developed social enterprises as one way to overcome barriers around the employability of ex-offenders. However at the time of writing there is currently very little that brings together learning or examples of effective practice to assist others in doing this.

Recognising this gap, the Home Office commissioned a short term programme of work undertaken in February and March 2013 by Clinks and Social Firms UK.

The programme set out to explore and assess the role of social enterprises in enabling both adult and young offenders to access training and employment opportunities. The results provide a body of work that will significantly contribute to cross-Government thinking about how to embed and support social enterprises working with offenders. The programme included two elements:

- The development and publication of this series of twenty Case Studies. The social enterprises featured in the case study series were invited, following a competitive application process, to write about their own experiences and insights into the opportunities and barriers confronting their development and sustainability.
- A Summary Report which brings together the key learning about developing and sustaining social enterprises offering employment and employability training to offenders.

Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

These resources also complement previous work undertaken in partnership between Clinks and the Home Office aimed at increasing the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector's involvement in local IOM arrangements.

* Ministry of Justice. May 2013. *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*: www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation

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Procurement Training & Employment Consultancy

**Helping offenders gain market
relevant training and job experience**

Steve Agger, Fusion21

Introduction

This case study presents Fusion21's experience of developing a social enterprise to help offenders to gain market relevant training and job experience.

Recognising the gap between the skills that offenders have and what the market wants has been key to our delivery model. We have also focused heavily on building strong, mutually beneficial relationships between local employers and prisons.

In this case study we explore how social enterprises can grow resilient links with the private sector to provide effective pathways into permanent employment for offenders. We also examine the barriers to sustaining a socially motivated prisoner training enterprise like our own.

Our business model centres on four pillars of delivery:

1. A prison-based vocational skills programme
2. An prison industry transfer project
3. A Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) employability initiative
4. Employment opportunities on release.

Through this case study we hope to demonstrate our experience and learning so other social enterprises can establish similar self-sustaining business models.

Background

Fusion21 is a social enterprise that promotes public procurement as a means to save money and create social outcomes. Working nationally, Fusion21 links public sector contracts across numerous organisations, to the creation of training opportunities and sustainable jobs for local people. Since 2002 we have created over one thousand and thirty permanent jobs.

Fusion21 was set up a decade ago by seven housing providers in Merseyside. Their aim was to drive down costs and get the best quality from suppliers by combining their buying power. They also wanted to create jobs and training opportunities through joint procurement. This was done by including social clauses in supplier contracts. For every £650,000 of work awarded to a supplier, we secured employment for a local person with that supplier.

Much of our work has centred on finding jobs for hard to reach and disadvantaged groups. Over thirty-five women, twenty-five people from BME backgrounds, twenty individuals with disabilities and three hundred and fifty ex-offenders have been trained through our skills programme.

But this was about more than just qualifications. Many of the ex-offender trainees reported that the programme had given them something to get out of bed for and that it continued the routine they had built up in prison. They said the programme gave them back some of the disciplines of mainstream life such as working in a team and to a deadline, being punctual and responding to a manager's instructions.

It is this multi-layered approach that put employment and vocational training at the heart of the Ministry of Justice's 2010 green paper, *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation*

and Sentencing of Offenders. This document reported that sixty-eight percent of prisoners thought that having a job would be important in helping them to stop re-offending. In 2011 the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published the paper Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation. This stated that offender learning must become an authentic part of local skills and employment systems. Ideas included using employers to design learning programmes to meet the demands of local labour markets.

Fusion21 began to develop its current business model in response to this policy landscape based on our past success in training ex-offenders.

Our experience: Fusion21

Our current business model is based on four strands of delivery. We have made a strategic decision to create a joined up journey for offenders, providing linked interventions at different stages of their sentence and reintegration process.

1. Prison-based vocational skills programme

The review of offender learning concluded that, despite a trebling in funding for prison skills programmes, there was little evidence that this had led to a consistent pattern of employment on release. Learning did not always improve a prisoner's employability and timing of the training was often ad hoc, unrelated to when they were due for release. We were keen to reverse this and so we provided training for people towards end of their sentences to prepare them for the outside. We wanted to give offenders qualifications directly linked to market demand.

Our team consulted with suppliers, manufacturers and industry partners to determine the most relevant qualifications for their labour force. This helped us to develop a City and Guilds qualification in construction which introduced trainees to trades such as fitting kitchens and bathrooms as well as plastering and tiling.

Fusion21 then began working as a sub-contractor to Manchester College, a prime contractor to the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). This relationship with Manchester College has enabled us to deliver a skills programme in HMP Liverpool where, to date, nearly one hundred prisoners have achieved a City and Guilds Level 1 in construction. We're now working with Manchester College to set up new workshops to train inmates at HMP Haverigg in Cumbria.

2. Prison Industries

Fusion21 is working with HMP Liverpool to develop a social enterprise where inmates manufacture products which are then bought by housing associations through our existing contract frameworks.

The key is finding the right business partner who can transfer part of their production process into prisons. If successful, this model could be rolled out creating profit-generating businesses on the inside. Surpluses would help prisoners to develop their CVs and gain accredited training. Crucially, this model will not take jobs away from law-abiding people. Instead it would work with firms that want to set up new parts of their business or as an incentive to companies wanting to transfer off-shore work back to the UK.

But there are some issues to resolve. Can manufacturers afford the set-up costs? Do they have enough guaranteed work to transfer into prisons? Many firms cannot see

beyond the next six months in their order book. As a result, we are speaking to suppliers providing services through our procurement frameworks where demand is guaranteed for the next few years, to see how much work they can outsource to prisons. We also want to team up with firms that can offer additional social value. For example, are they able to offer offenders training and employment opportunities on release?

Another challenge lies in how we market this prison industry transfer to housing associations buying through Fusion21 contract frameworks. How can we convince them to buy prison-made goods? Will it fit with their triple bottom line in terms of cost, corporate social responsibility targets and benefits for local communities? We are currently going through a competitive dialogue process to identify appropriate business partners and will work through many of these issues.

3. Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) employability programme

Fusion21 has developed a partnership with HMP Kennett, a resettlement prison in Merseyside. We offer vocational training at the end of their sentences to inmates who have begun reintegration. Offenders on day release can take part in our community skills employability programme, funded by OLASS.

Initially, offenders are supported to develop their CVs. They learn how to use job search engines. They meet potential employers and gain experience of the social dynamics associated with employment. Inmates who demonstrate potential are given three-week voluntary work placements. Their ability to perform in a real-life work situation is then assessed. Finally, those offenders showing capability are considered for paid temporary job placements for three months. These opportunities start close to their release date.

We have used our relationships with housing organisations to find suitable work for day release prisoners in the neighbourhoods they will be returning to. Many social landlords have seasonal contracts that are often difficult to fill as many people do not want short term jobs. These opportunities provide an ideal reintroduction into the world of work for offenders. However, we must avoid taking any opportunities away from members of the general public.

4. Employment on release

In 2011 Fusion21 set up a social enterprise called Employer Pool. Over two thousand job-seekers, many of them long term unemployed, have signed up to this ethical employment agency, which finds temporary work with local employers.

Employer Pool acts as host employer; offering firms a risk-free way of taking on workers, without the burden of awarding permanent contracts or dealing with payroll issues. It doesn't charge finders' fees and encourages Small and Medium-sized Enterprises to take on apprentices through a shared apprenticeship model. When Employer Pool candidates are not in work they can attend free training courses and work clubs to gain qualifications and improve their job application and interview skills.

All these factors point to Employer Pool being the ideal vehicle to help offenders find temporary work on release and to avoid the damaging effects of long-term unemployment. Research shows that short term jobs regularly lead to permanent work and it's the security of longer term employment that will bring down re-offending rates.

Key learning

1. Attitude of employers: how can we allay their fears and build credibility?

If a company is presented with a potential employee who has been to prison, they may have questions. What are the implications for the business? Will they disrupt it? Will this person be violent? Will they steal?

There are some categories of offenders that Fusion21 would not put forward. But generally the key to engaging employers is retaining their confidence and building credibility. This is vital as employers are the life blood of our business.

But how have we achieved this? It comes from strong communication – being on hand to answer queries and calm any fears. It comes from providing support to both employers and offenders. This is where our Release on Temporary Licence employment initiative is useful, as prisoners come to employers on approval. Information is shared between us and the prisons and the approved offenders have been assessed as having the attitude and capability to deliver for an employer.

2. Preparing prisoners prior to seeking employment: what can be done?

Fusion21 picks up intelligence by consulting with employers. This reveals what employers want from job seekers and we ensure this is translated into our training. It isn't just about vocational skills. Employers tell us the characteristics and attitudes they're looking for and this helps us to prepare offenders for the world of work.

3. Industries in prison: how can we ensure they are self sustaining?

It is important that our prison industry transfer model generates a profit. Not just because of the current climate of funding cuts but also because the surplus can fund offender mentoring and other 'through the gate' support.

Current market conditions have made it tough. Many private sector manufacturers do not have enough guaranteed orders to transfer a proportion of their work into prisons. So we have decided to involve suppliers within our existing contract frameworks in this transfer model. For example, every year, housing associations need fencing and other grounds maintenance services. We have learnt that working with well-established businesses that we know to have a secure market and assured order volumes is the best way to ensure our prison industries social enterprise is self sustaining.

4. Developing an end-to-end offender journey: how we link to other pathways?

Maintaining all four pillars of delivery is central to the achievement of this social enterprise. These pillars ensure Fusion21 retains positive connections with offenders during their time in custody and as they reintegrate into the community. We feel this continuity is vital to the scheme's success.

At all times we ensure there is a clear focus on vocational skills and employment but we also recognise the importance of other issues such as substance misuse, housing and family issues. We work closely with a range of agencies providing support in these areas. If these other problems are not addressed then they impinge on an offender's ability to focus on training and finding a job.

5. Learning from offenders: so they succeed in the labour market

Fusion21 does not just consult with employers. We have set up formal arrangements so we can capture the thoughts of people going through the training process and feed this through to accreditation bodies. This is crucial as there are many implications to modifying a nationally recognised qualification, yet changes are sometimes necessary to ensure a qualification is fit for purpose. We regularly speak to offenders about the qualifications we are developing to ensure they meet their needs and to check they are relevant to the challenges they face.

